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Mr. Richard's Fiancée

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Suppose you were a young college girl, trying to make an honest living as a book agent: and suppose that at the very first house you visited a flustered young man should demand that you be his fiancée—

AS Miss Abigail Vincent followed with a confident air a highway on the North Shore of Massachusetts, there was nothing in her appearance to justify a suspicion that she was a book agent. While her only visible impedimenta were a blue parasol and a purse, she carried, secreted in her blue cloth skirt (whence it could be extracted with ease between her admission to a house and the appearance of its lord or lady), a morocco-bound dummy of "The History of a Thousand Years," containing sample pages of that monumental work, with testimonials from many persons whose names are household words in every part of America.

The head of the subscription department of the publishing house had suggested to Gail this manner of hiding the incriminating dummy, and as she glanced down at her skirt she was satisfied that the most critical observer would not have noticed the slight sag on the left side, where the volume was tucked away in a pocket of her own fashioning.

This was early in July. In June Gail had received from the University of Nebraska a document which recited that she was entitled to all the credit and glory that appertain to the degree of a bachelor of arts in every part of the world. And not without much ingenious financiering, and many hours devoted to tutoring, typewriting for the faculty, and other labor, had she won this boon.

But, far from being satisfied, she had fixed her eyes (which were blue) upon a course in pedagogy at Columbia. As her parents had died leaving her with only a paltry two hundred dollars a year, this further ambition obviously was not easily to be attained. But Gail supplemented a resolute and venturesome spirit with mental qualities to which the Phi Beta Kappa key attached to her watch-chain bore ample testimony.

THE advertisement of the subscription agent had called for "young women of good address and neat appearance, capable of presenting the merits of a standard work to educated people." Any one would have said that Gail answered all these requirements. A blue-eyed girl with fair hair, irreproachable complexion, and a winning smile, it was inconceivable that the least hospitable of doors would ever slam in her face. And yet already this morning the doors of three handsome villas had closed upon her with discouraging finality.

Her next attack was upon the handsomest estate she had yet seen, a big Georgian house planted well back from the road, with a formal garden in front and the twinkling sea beyond. Here, certainly, must be domiciled persons of wealth and culture awaiting the glad tidings of the singular merits of "The History of a Thousand Years," illustrated by the great masters, and with ten off for cash.

She boldly sounded the knocker, and glanced casually at the label on the wrapper of a newspaper that lay on a stand in the entry. The name was Maybury—Mrs. Giles J. Maybury. By exercising a little ingenuity she could usually acquaint herself in advance with the names of householders. Her hopes rose. She played with her parasol, and assumed the air of a young lady abroad solely for social pleasure.

As she waited she thrust out her foot to assure herself that the dummy lay in its hidden pocket, easily accessible. In her room at the Beverly boarding-house she had practised extracting it. The feat could be accomplished in an instant, and any one observing her would have thought she was tying her shoe.

A white-haired butler opened the door and blinked in the strong sunlight.

"Is Mrs. Maybury at home?" she asked, with her most engaging smile.

"Yes, mum."

"I should like—" she began.

"Are you—you must be the young lady she's expecting?"

HE surveyed her critically, and yet without the hostility against which she had steeled herself. His shift from an inquiry to an affirmation was encouraging. He was a benevolent-looking person, and in assuming that she was the expected young lady his manner became, she thought, slightly confidential. She was not the young lady Mrs. Maybury was expecting, but she determined to broaden her experience immediately by learning just how persons of wealth and culture receive young ladies who practise deceit in gaining entrance to their houses.

"You may come into the living-room, miss. Mrs. Maybury hasn't been down yet. I'll tell her you've come."

Again the confidential, slightly patronizing, reassuring air. He held back the light summer portières, and she entered a long living-room, with broad windows through which she caught a glimpse of the sea. The room satisfied in every particular her ideal of a seaside villa: the scene could not have been more fittingly set for her first presentation of the wonders of "The History of a Thousand Years." As the man left her, her hand stole cautiously to the edge of her skirt; but he reappeared instantly and walked toward her on tiptoe.

"Pardon me, miss; but you will understand if Mrs. Maybury seems a bit nervous. It's all so unexpected, she's been quite upset."

He glanced toward the door furtively, and then whispered, with the back of his hand to shield his mouth:

"The missis is very fond of Mr. Richard; it's bound to come out all right. We're all that fond of Mr. Richard—"

A noise in the hall caused him to start; then he bent closer and whispered huskily:

"Most unfortunate thing has occurred, miss. The Bishop and Mrs. Barton arrived this morning; it's most deplorable." He seemed at the point of tears. "Mr. Richard has been to town to meet you. He must have missed your train. Perhaps you'd rather see him first. It might make it easier for you, miss."

Gail was fully persuaded that she had committed a serious error in attempting to palm herself off as the young lady who was expected. Still, she was in a house, and its mistress was at home, and sometime, somewhere, she must begin her business career. The butler waited deferentially for her answer. She determined to see the thing through at any hazard.

"I don't know that it's necessary," she murmured uncertainly.

He retired, bowing a meek acceptance of her wishes.

FIVE minutes passed. She extracted the dummy from its pocket, and then in a sudden panic restored it to its hiding-place. She had barely disposed of it when, with startling abruptness, a short, stocky man in clerical dress appeared, paused an instant, and then advanced resolutely.

"My dear young lady," he began, "you will pardon my presumption, but it seemed best that I should see you before you meet Mrs. Maybury. I trust that you will understand fully what this means to Richard's mother. My poor sister-in-law has been deeply shocked—as, indeed, we have all been. It was a great blow to my dear wife; she was quite prostrated when we arrived an hour ago and learned of Richard's—er—intentions."

He glanced down at the gloved hand he had been holding, relinquished it slowly, and resumed:

"Please understand that personally, being in a sense an outsider and not really a Maybury,—and not, I assure you, quite sharing their traditional ideas in social matters,—I merely wish to act the part of a good friend to one and all."

He sank into a chair and began polishing his glasses.

Gail chilled as she realized that she was becoming deeply enmeshed in the domestic affairs of this home of wealth and culture. The Bishop was inspecting her with care, and yet with something akin to the tolerance the butler had manifested.

His back was to the door; and, as Gail planned a hasty exit to escape the further consequences of her temerariousness, the curtains swayed and a young man thrust in his head and gesticulated wildly. As near as she could interpret his use of the sign language, he wished her to remain; she even read into his communications his earnest desire that she should not disturb the Bishop in his misapprehension as to her identity.

He was a deeply tanned young man, clad in white ducks and a blue serge coat, and from the expression of his countenance he was experiencing emotions of the most poignant nature. As his mad gesturing continued, Gail sat back in her chair and fixed her attention upon the Bishop.

"All my life," the Bishop continued, with an ingratiating smile, "I have been deeply sympathetic with the theater. The people of the stage have always seemed to me deserving of our sympathy and—er—gratitude. But you must understand, my dear Miss—er—Gilmore—that people like the Mayburys and Eatons—Mrs.

Maybury was an Eaton—with their severe social standards, look askance at the thought of one of their sons forming an—er—alliance with a young woman of the theater."

Gail's eyes opened wide with mystification, and her lips parted. Once more the eavesdropper became visible and resumed his frantic signaling. Clearly, he was urging her to permit and encourage the Bishop in the belief that she was a certain Miss Gilmore, an actress, who was about to marry into the august house of Maybury. A slight agitation of the curtains indicated that the young gentleman clung to his post as if prepared to resist by force any effort on her part to escape.

"I wish you to know, my dear child, that I feel for you very deeply, and that I am entirely at your service if I can be of any help to you in this most unusual situation. Pardon me if I suggest a certain sobriety of tone as most likely to help you through these first trying hours. I am sure you will not take it amiss that I volunteer these suggestions. Richard is a charming boy—my favorite nephew, in fact, as he is my dear wife's. We have the strongest hopes of his success in life, and in that we may, I am sure, rely upon your—er—fullest coöperation."

As Richard was mentioned, the curtain parted and the young lunatic tapped his broad chest idiotically in what Gail took to be an effort to identify himself with the Richard under discussion.

"You will grant me the privilege of an old man if I say—if I may make bold to say—that my own first impressions are wholly—er—gratifying."

He beamed upon her, patted her hand gently, and left the room.

GAIL was stealing cautiously toward the door, when the agile young man suddenly confronted her. He drew a handkerchief across his face, and shook his head with relief.

"Don't go! For heaven's sake, don't leave me!" he entreated. "You've got to go through with it now."

Awed by his menacing attitude, Gail jumped behind the chair she had just vacated, and thus barricaded flourished her parasol threateningly. Instead of being expelled from the first home of wealth and culture she had invaded, there seemed a strong possibility that she would spend her life there unless she effected an immediate escape.

"Just a moment, please!" pleaded the young man, who seemed at the verge of tears. "It's a great favor, but, really, you can help me out of an awful scrape. My mother's gone all to pieces—even after she said I might ask 'Toinette down here and let me think she was going to stand for it all right. And now Aunt Peggy and the Bishop have blown in, and 'Toinette's lost! If you'll just spend the day here it'll help a lot, and I'll think up some way of getting rid of Aunt Peggy. You can see for yourself that if 'Toinette doesn't show up when she's expected that will have a rotten look. Mother won't understand it; it—"

"Would you mind telling me," interrupted Gail, "just what all this is about? I'm a book agent, and got into the house by mistake. Unless you can control yourself long enough to look at my prospectus, I must leave immediately."

"Splendid!" cried the young man hoarsely. "Stay, and I'll take a carload of your books—stay till after lunch anyway, and you'll never regret it!"

Gail pondered. If she let this opportunity pass, she might continue her tramp to the Maine border without effecting a sale. The son of Mrs. Giles J. Maybury was doubtless financially responsible for any contracts he might make. No harm could come of eating the Mayburys' food, particularly when it seemed likely that she could save this young man's life by masquerading as the missing 'Toinette.

"If you'll subscribe for the India-paper edition of 'The History of a Thousand Years,'" she said in a crisp, businesslike tone, "I'll stay—for lunch."

"Done!" he assented greedily.

"It's ten off for cash," she suggested.

"We'll waive the discount; just stay, that's all!"

"If you'll turn your back a moment—"

He stared, thinking she meditated flight through the nearest window, then swung round. She bent down and deftly extracted the dummy.

"Now," she said, extending it opened to the space for signatures, "sign there."

He grabbed a pen from the table, and wrote his name in a wild scrawl.

She blew upon it to dry the ink, and read carefully: *Richard G. Maybury.*

"I'll just add that it's the India-paper edition," she remarked calmly.

He danced about restlessly as she made the notation.

"I'll give you a check—I'll give you anything you want!"

"One hundred dollars," she remarked succinctly.

He nodded an impatient acquiescence and glanced toward the door.

"Now that's all settled, and I'm to give your family the pleasure of my company at luncheon as part of the bargain. Suppose you coach me a little," she added, "as to the part I'm to play."

"You see," he began hurriedly, resting his hands on the long table and bending toward her, "'Toinette—Miss Gilmore—is the girl I'm engaged to. She's an actress—only in the chorus now, you know, but that's where they all begin. I got acquainted with her last winter when she was playing in Boston in 'The Little Billikin'—a month's run. It was my last year in the law school, you know."

"I suppose you got your degree?" she asked practically.

"Oh, yes; and I'm going into one of the best offices in Boston in October," he replied impatiently. "But about Miss Gilmore—I want you to know that mother's acted fine about it. When I told her of my engagement she said she would have 'Toinette down, and when she said that I knew it would be all right."

"And after she said that, your mother went to bed and your aunt and her husband appeared?"

"Well, mother has never been strong since father died two years ago. That was a great shock to her," he said defensively.

THE book agent's manner of receiving his confession struck him as deficient in sympathy. She was a self-possessed person, disconcertingly direct in her statements; and she was a pretty girl. It was a new and unwelcome experience to be humiliating himself before a pretty girl. 'Toinette—the third one from the left in "The Little Billikin"—was not, he reflected, a greater delight to the eye than this book agent. Both were fair, but the book agent's nose was straighter than 'Toinette's, and the girl before him would have nothing to fear in a complexion contest with his fiancée.

"It's not mother I'm afraid of so much as Aunt Peggy," he continued. "You know, she's always been mighty fond of me, and I'm—well, it's been understood that she's always said she meant to do the handsome thing by me."

"And, being a far-seeing man, you're afraid of spoiling your expectations?"

"That's not fair!" he pleaded. "I mentioned the money merely to show you how delicate the situation is. Aunt Peggy has been a particular pal of mine, and her coming here now complicates the whole business with mother. I wanted to have it out with mother, and get her to help pull Aunt Peggy over. There's no question of money—I'd go out without a dollar and fight the world for 'Toinette. She's the truest, squarest little girl that ever lived, and never had a mercenary idea in her life. Her people are poor," he ran on glibly, "but respectable in every way, and it isn't her fault that she had to go out to earn her living."

"Certainly not," Gail agreed.

A cough in the hall caused Maybury to stand at attention. The butler appeared, his broad face twitching.

"Pardon me, Mr. Richard, but Mrs. Maybury says she will see Miss Gilmore at once. Your trunk has come, miss; the maid will show you your room."

When his step had died away, Gail bent a look of dismay upon the young lord of the household.

"My trunk?"

Again Richard mopped his face, and beat the air with his fists.

"It's 'Toinette's trunk. God knows what's become of her! She wired me she'd be down on the ten-forty; and now her trunk's come, and—"

He stared at her helplessly.

"Something terrible must have happened to 'Toinette," he moaned.

"Something terrible may happen to me before I get out of this! If I were you I'd cheer up. If the girl is the nice girl I assume her to be, you needn't be afraid your family won't like her. From the way you act, one might get the impression you're not so keen about her yourself."

"Oh, no; it's not that! I'm thinking of 'Toinette—of her ordeal in coming into a strange house, and being looked over—and the servants—"

He gave his collar an impatient twitch.

"I suppose it hasn't occurred to you that I *may* have some feelings," Gail suggested sweetly. "And when they find out that I'm a fraud, what are they going to say to you? It occurs to me that you are merely postponing the day of wrath. You've still got them to deal with."

"Oh, I know all that, but I can't face it to-day; I simply couldn't! Oh, you won't go—you will stand by me!"

"For lunch, thank you! And when Miss Gilmore comes, please have the decency to get me out of the house before you introduce her. I want safe conduct through the lines!"

IN the upper hall a white-capped maid met Gail and led the way to a bedroom that expressed the last word in taste and comfort. A silver tray containing a pitcher of milk and slices of bread and butter spoke for a well ordered and hospitable household. Even as the butler had viewed Gail with interest, the maid inspected her with guarded curiosity.

"May I open your trunk for you, miss?" she asked, indicating a badly worn steamer-trunk with the initials A. G. painted on the end.

"I'm afraid I've lost my key," Gail replied, opening her purse. "But don't trouble now. We'll attend to it after luncheon. By the way, what's the luncheon hour?"

"One-thirty, miss."

She took Gail's hat and jacket, and while she was depositing them with ceremonial care in a closet, Gail refreshed herself with a glass of milk.

"Mrs. Maybury is quite ready to see you," the maid volunteered, after carefully brushing Gail's skirt. "Pardon me, miss, but it's better not to keep her waiting. She's quite nervous this morning."

Gail expressed her regret at Mrs. Maybury's indisposition, and gave a touch to her hair.

"I'm ready," she announced.

The maid led the way down the hall, knocked on a door, and left in haste.

"Come!" called a faint voice.

Gail stepped into a dimly lighted room, and hesitated, clinging to the door. Her panic passed quickly, and she found herself walking toward a small, white-haired woman in a dressing-wrapper, with a silk shawl drawn over her shoulders.

"My dear child, so you've come!"

Gail felt a small hand clutching hers, and a pair of brown eyes in which tears glistened regarded her eagerly, bravely.

"It's very nice that you let me come," said Gail, picking up a pillow that had tumbled from the invalid's chair. "But I'm so sorry you are not well. I'm afraid you've been troubled—troubled about Richard—and me."

"He's all I have," said the little woman, drawing a handkerchief from the sleeve of her dressing-wrapper. "Of course, I've been deeply anxious; but now—" She smiled as she peered into Gail's face.

"I think I understand your feeling, Mrs. Maybury. And I want to say," Gail continued, deeply touched by the woman's frailty, "that if you don't approve—if you have misgivings, there must be an end to everything."

She paused, alarmed at her volubility. She realized that she was acting and speaking for a person whose bearing in the difficult situation might have been wholly different—to whom, indeed, for all she knew, Mrs. Maybury might have capitulated at sight.

"That is generous; that is very sweet of you! I have nothing to live for but my boy's happiness, and yours too, of course. And now," she added, with a wistful smile, "we must get acquainted!

"Please throw up the shades," she said, sinking into her chair. "I haven't even had a good look at you yet! That's right; thank you. You've seen Richard? He meant to meet you, of course. I thought I'd rather see you alone first. I hope you find your room comfortable. My servants have been with me for years—all except the cook, who came yesterday and won't do at all. Servants are a great problem; I haven't the strength to fight them. I suppose you have all such experiences ahead of you.

"My dear child, you are quite tall! I wasn't prepared for that; Richard has spoken of you as a little girl. But you are fair, as he described you—there's the photograph he brought me. You won't mind my saying that I'm glad you don't wear your hair all the time as the photograph shows it. You have lovely hair. Sit down there, won't you; and you won't mind if I stare a bit? That picture was taken for professional purposes, I suppose. I met Ellen Terry once at a luncheon—my only encounter with stage folk.

"Please hand me the salts, dear. My old head is very troublesome sometimes. Yes, that's the one. Were your people French? Richard didn't know. Antoinette suggested it. I've lived in France a great deal, and I read a good many French books. Perhaps you speak French?"

"I can read it a little, but I don't vouch for my accent," Gail admitted.

"We shall test that after a while," remarked Mrs. Maybury, indicating a table littered with books.

Gail's eye fell upon copies of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and *L'Illustration*. She must exercise caution; if Miss Gilmore was unfamiliar with the French language, it was not decent for her to flourish her own accomplishments, gained by three years' study at Lincoln, Nebraska.

Her qualms of conscience at deceiving Mrs. Maybury yielded to a feeling of resentment toward her son. It was brutally unfilial in Richard Maybury to have given his mother cause for anxiety. And Gail was moved to pity for the unknown 'Toinette, whose head, saucily uptilted in the photograph, was not without a certain charm in spite of the tangle of fluffy hair of which Mrs. Maybury had mildly disapproved. "To Dicky from 'Toinette," was written over the lower half of the card.

MRS. MAYBURY was undoubtedly making a supreme effort to maintain her composure; several times she knit her brows and pressed her hand to her head. She continued to talk—of the Shore, of past summers, avoiding the questions which Gail surmised must be thronging through her mind.

"Please don't talk any more now," said Gail; "there'll be plenty of time later."

She stepped behind the chair and began passing her hands gently across Mrs. Maybury's forehead.

"Sometimes this helps. Tell me if I bother you."

Mrs. Maybury touched Gail's hands in sign of gratitude, and closed her eyes.

A clock on the mantel struck twelve, and Gail's spirits rose. In three hours, at most, she would be free to continue her march up the coast. She let down her patient's hair, and brushed it with slow, evenly timed strokes. In a few minutes the tiny figure relaxed. She satisfied herself that Mrs. Maybury was asleep, and sat down in the window-seat.

A light tap disturbed her reverie. She crossed the room noiselessly and stepped into the hall, where the maid presented a scared face.

"If you please, miss, Mrs. Barton wishes to see you. She thinks maybe you'd

"'I am sure,' said the Bishop, 'you will not take it amiss that I volunteer these suggestions. Richard is a charming boy—' As Richard was mentioned, the young lunatic in the doorway tapped his chest idiotically."

better not stay longer with Mrs. Maybury. I hope—"

"Mrs. Maybury is asleep," said Gail, "and not to be disturbed. Which is Mrs. Barton's room?"

"The last one on the left, miss."

On the stairway leading to the third floor, Gail saw Mr. Richard Maybury peering down at her, and wigwagging energetically, with the evident purpose of warning her to avoid Mrs. Barton's room.

Gail lifted her head scornfully.

"Well?" she said, as the maid lingered.

"She's a bit peppery, miss."

"Thank you," said Gail. "What else is troubling you?"

"It's the new cook, miss," the maid faltered. "She's making an awful fuss in the kitchen. Mr. Richard's that upset, he can't do anything. I ought to tell Mrs. Maybury. Cook is swearing and saying she won't leave, and Grimes wants to send for the police."

"I'll see her," said Gail. "Say to Mrs. Barton I'll be in in a moment."

"Yes, miss."

A BIG middle-aged Irishwoman turned from the larding of a filet and scowled as Gail entered the kitchen. In a corner a young girl bent over a table, peeling potatoes and washing them with tears.

"Cook," said Gail briskly, "Mrs. Maybury has decided that you won't do. You will please pack your things and leave the house immediately. By the time you're ready I'll have your money—two weeks added—is that right?"

Cook gripped her knife and drew herself up like a queen of tragedy.

"And who be you," she bellowed, "to come down here dischargin' o' me! It's a high time o' day when a gur-rul from the the-a-ter and God knows what else comes dancin' into me kitchin and tellin' me—a decent workin'-woman—to begone! I'll be after tellin' ye I gave up a good place to come here, thinkin' th' wages was better and th' sea air good for me health—"

"We're not discussing this matter. You're discharged. I want you to leave the house in half an hour. I'll have the chauffeur take you into town."

"I'll not do ut—I'll not—"

"If you're not off the place in thirty minutes I'll call the Beverly police." Gail swung round upon the blubbering girl:

"I suppose you know how to cook. Go ahead the best you can with luncheon, and if you get into trouble, call me."

The cook threw the carving knife into the sink with a loud clatter, and crossed the kitchen with a majestic stride.

"They tould me it was a respectible house; if they'd tould me th' likes o' you, a meddlesome stage actor-ess—"

Gail took a step toward her; the door closed upon cook with a bang.

"Don't be silly!" Gail admonished the weeping potato-parer. "That woman wouldn't hurt a fly. Boil an onion and get the smell of whisky out of the place."

She passed through the pantry to the dining-room and on to the second floor. The butler thrust his head out of a door, and was in the act of withdrawing it hastily, when Gail arrested him.

"Please find Mr. Maybury and tell him to give cook a check for her wages. And if there's a machine on the place, have it ready in half an hour to take her to town. And you might see what you can do toward finding a new cook."

"Yes, miss," said Grimes brokenly, regarding Gail with deference and admiration. "And, if you please, the plumber has come, and Mrs. Maybury wished most partickler to see 'im. It's about the hot water, miss. It's a question, if you please, of repairin' the old boiler or puttin' in a new style heater. He's from the city, miss, and been waitin' an hour."

Gail pondered this momentous matter judicially, with her head slightly tilted in the manner of one given to cautious judgment.

"Tell him to repair the old boiler and send an estimate for a new heater. Mrs. Maybury will see no one till after luncheon."

"Thank ye, miss. And, if you please, miss, Mr. Richard wished me to say it would be better not to see Mrs. Barton."

"You may tell Mr. Richard," said Gail tartly, "that I shall use my own judgment in the matter. Show me Mrs. Barton's door."

The Bishop opened the door to her tap.

"Margaret, Miss Gilmore," he announced to a lady who lay in a heavily blanketed bed; and then, as if seized with mortal fear, he hurried from the room.

Mrs. Barton sat up in bed, groaned, glared, and fell back upon her pillows.

"So you're the girl, are you?"

"I'm a girl!" Gail retorted.

Mrs. Barton was a large woman, with a masculine face, iron-gray hair, and a pair of particularly keen dark eyes. The eyes bored through Gail for a moment. When she had finished her scrutiny, she pointed to a chair.

"SO you're the young woman who's been making a fool of my nephew!—and sending his poor mother to her grave! I always supposed Dick had more sense than to go dancing after a chorus girl. But there's no accounting for men. You must have some peculiar fascination for the sex; my husband came in here and bragged about you to me—to me—just as if I didn't have eyes in my own head to judge people with! I suppose you don't understand that this means ruin to the boy—the absolute blasting of all our hopes for him. Why don't you come right out with it and tell me how much you want? You and I can arrange this whole matter quietly, without bothering my poor sister with it. I'll agree to anything reasonable. Be sensible now, and let's get through with this foolishness. I'm a frank person; let's have no beating about the bush."

"I'm a frank person myself," remarked Gail hotly, "and I'm sorry to have to remind you that I'm a guest in this house, and that while I'm here I don't propose to be insulted by you or anybody else. If you had a spark of womanliness in you—or mercy, or charity—you wouldn't talk this way to another woman, no matter how little you trusted her. As for taking your money, I'll settle that right now by telling you that I'm not for sale—not for all the money in the family. I hope we understand each other!"

With considerable difficulty and much groaning, Mrs. Barton raised herself in her bed.

"Humph! So that's the tune, is it?"

"It is," Gail affirmed. "And I'll say to you further that, as far as your nephew's concerned, the world is pretty full of decent, self-respecting, industrious young men, and that I'm not so sure it's to my best interests to marry a young man who has never earned a dollar in his life and may settle down to being a loafer, for all I know."

A deep groan was Mrs. Barton's answer. Gail asked politely if she was suffering.

"Suffering! What do you know about suffering? You don't look as if you ever had an ache or pain in your life! Don't people suffer when they have lumbago? I knew it was a mistake, going out on the Cape; and the sheets at the Livingstons' were damp—I knew they were damp! And to come up here for peace and find this house all upset! And that maid had the effrontery to tell me there isn't a mustard plaster on the place. To keep house without mustard plasters! I've warned my sister time and again to have mustard plasters on hand when I come."

"If you'll calm yourself for a few minutes, I'll make you a mustard plaster."

"You—you!" cried Mrs. Barton. "Well, see what you can do and hurry back."

Gail found the five servants of the household in executive session in the kitchen. They were discussing Gail, as she knew instantly from their precipitate exits. The potato-parer had ceased whimpering; she produced mustard and flour, and went in search of linen.

IN ten minutes Gail was back in Mrs. Barton's chamber. The sufferer sniffed the plaster critically, groaned, and gave directions for its application.

"I must say that you have more sense than I expected to find in a theater girl," she panted, after the plaster had been put to work and Gail had turned the patient upon her back. "Why didn't you learn trained nursing and keep away from the stage? Some very nice girls go into nursing."

"Of course only very naughty girls go on the stage," Gail returned with spirit. "Just for politeness' sake, let's agree that your nephew is a gentleman and not likely to take up with a girl he wouldn't be proud to introduce to his mother and her family. I think we'll all be happier if you will see it that way."

"Are you trying to be impertinent to me?" Mrs. Barton demanded.

"That's as you please to look at it," Gail answered, walking to the window.

She stood dreamily watching a sail stealing along the horizon until a moan from the bed aroused her. The mustard had begun to assert its power.

"I really believe that thing's going to help me," Mrs. Barton announced.

"Tell me when it gets too hot and I'll take it off," said Gail amiably.

With grim stoicism Mrs. Barton endured it for twenty minutes, diverting herself with questions as to Gail's ancestors, education, and outlook on life.

Being without data as to Miss 'Toinette Gilmore's history, Gail gave rein to her imagination. The Gilmores were an old Vermont family. Miss Gilmore, as Gail depicted her, was a person of highly respectable, even distinguished antecedents. After shaking a box of talcum over the area rubricated by the mustard, she said:

"I'll go now, unless there's something else I can do for you."

"Well," Mrs. Barton assented grudgingly, "I suppose that silly Richard is waiting for you. You may send Marie in. I'll be down for luncheon. I never take my meals in bed, young woman."

"I rather prefer taking nourishment in an upright position myself," Gail replied.

"What's that?" demanded Mrs. Barton, a grim, reluctant smile crossing her face.

"I said I didn't like eating in bed."

WHEN Gail, having been summoned for luncheon, entered the living-room, Mr. Richard Maybury sprang up hastily.

"Well!" he ejaculated anxiously.

"Well!" Gail mocked.

"How's mother?" he asked.

"Very comfortable—thank you."

"And Aunt Peggy? I'm not responsible for what she may have said to you: I tried to warn you to keep away from her. I'd like to have saved you from anything remotely disagreeable," he added, with honest contrition.

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Mr. Richard's Fiancée

Continued from page 5

"Oh, Mrs. Barton's feeling better now. I put a mustard plaster on her back, and that helped to soothe her feelings. She'll be down for luncheon. I did my best to persuade her that Miss Gilmore is an eminently proper person to add to the family circle. I suppose you've heard from your fiancée by this time?"

"I've just had a wire from her," he replied. "She's in trouble. Oh, it's rotten, ghastly! You didn't see the morning paper? I hope nobody on the place saw it. I've torn it up." He indicated a pocket from which fragments of a newspaper protruded. He jammed them out of sight, and advanced upon Gail, whispering:

"A woman in her boarding-house lost her pocket-book, and 'Toinette's suspected— My God, it's awful—horrible!"

"Not—not arrested?" Gail gasped.

"Heavens, no! To make it all the worse, she skipped. My telegram came from Lowell—just 'Don't worry': not a word about where she's going!"

He crossed and recrossed the room with long strides, then paused before Gail.

"If mother hears that—"

"It would be rather nice of you," said Gail, "to think a little more about Miss Gilmore—of ways of helping her—a girl you've thought enough of to ask to marry you! I should think you'd go right up to Boston and see what you could do."

"Why should I go up to Boston, when she sends me a silly telegram from Lowell? For all I know, she may turn up here any minute! You haven't got any answer to that, have you? You don't know what to do about it now, do you?" he ended.

"It isn't my business to know; but I'll suggest that before your aunt and uncle you'd better pretend to be extremely cheerful. It's all right for you to bluster at me privately, but as my affianced husband something quite different will be expected. It's nothing to me, you understand, but before the others it would be better not to act as if you hated me."

"My God! I hate myself—I hate everybody!" he moaned.

"Don't do it, Mr. Maybury; it's bad for the nerves!"

"I think I'm losing my mind! I can't go through with it—I simply can't!"

"You ought to be able to stand it, if I can. If you'll be decent through luncheon, I'll see what can be done toward finding Miss Gilmore."

The appearance of the Bishop and Mrs. Barton ended what seemed likely to prove an unprofitable dialogue, and they went in to luncheon.

GAIL sat between Mrs. Barton and the Bishop, with Richard opposite. Mrs. Barton launched at once upon the miraculous diminution of her pains by the mustard plaster. When she ceased her praise of mustard as an invincible panacea, to demand of Grimes what brand of tea had been placed before her, the Bishop took heart to lift the conversation to a higher plane. The presence of a member of the theatrical profession quite naturally suggested the drama as a topic. Nothing, he declared, in the whole range of dramatic literature, had ever equaled the works of the Greek masters. He still found time to read his Euripides once a year. It was a pity that Greek tragedy was so little known in these times; Richard, he hoped, would not entirely drop the classics.

Richard mumbled that he knew no Greek—a confession that the Bishop deplored. Richard, himself the protagonist in a tragedy as poignant as any known to the Greek theater, frowned upon a bit of sea bass which the substitute cook, all things considered, had prepared very passably.

"And you, Miss Gilmore," said the Bishop kindly, "I suppose Greek hasn't entered into your—er—study of the drama? I realize that on the stage of to-day it is—er—quite impossible."

"I appeared once as Electra," Gail replied, ignoring a warning jerk of the unhappy Richard's head, and smiling upon the Bishop, whose disposition to be kind had won her gratitude.

"Where was that?" he asked, beaming.

"In Nebraska—at the University."

"Really! How delightful! Then you are familiar with those great literary monuments. Richard, this is the happiest of surprises."

"Miss Gilmore," Mrs. Barton intervened accusingly, "I thought you told me you were from Vermont. How did you come to go to school in Nebraska?"

"My father moved there when I was a child," Gail answered easily. "You will have to admit, Bishop Barton, that the Greek drama has been coming into its own. Every year the plays are given somewhere. Even—even at Harvard," she added, with an ironic glance at the dejected Richard,—"even at Harvard they haven't wholly scorned those old fellows."

"Neatly done; a bull's-eye!" the Bishop chortled, who, it appeared, was a Yale man.

Mrs. Barton was neglecting her food to bring her keen eyes to bear upon this chorus girl who had appeared as Electra. Conscious of this, Gail amused herself by entering into a discussion of the respective merits of Euripides and Sophocles. The Bishop quoted lines in the sonorous original; Gail translated them—haltingly, to encourage his prompting. He was enjoying himself tremendously; but a puzzled frown settled upon his spouse's face.

THE moment luncheon was concluded, Gail said she must go up to see Mrs. Maybury. The Bishop went off to write letters, first shaking hands with Gail and declaring that they must have many more talks on a subject dear to both their hearts. Richard, seeing that Mrs. Barton lingered behind with the obvious purpose of detaining Gail, immediately became invisible.

"Just a moment, Miss Gilmore!"

Mrs. Barton planted her hands upon Gail's shoulders.

"Young woman, don't try to deceive me—you're not a stage girl any more than I am. Just what is this joke you're playing here?"

"I'm very, very sorry," Gail began uneasily. "If I'd had time to think it over I should never have done it. I'm sorry—very sorry. You see—"

She gave a succinct account of her arrival at the house, and of her agreement to play the part of the expected fiancée in exchange for a subscription to her book.

"I thought at first it would be a lark, but after I saw Mrs. Maybury it wasn't funny any more. No one would want to play tricks on her—she's so kind and gentle. I'm ashamed to see her again."

"That Richard!" Mrs. Barton exclaimed. "So he's afraid of me, is he? Well, he has reason to be! And to think of imposing on you, to say nothing of the rest of us! But"—a merry twinkle danced in her eyes—"just how does he propose explaining this to his mother? I saw her a moment—just before I came down—and she was immensely relieved; she said you were adorable! If that other girl turns up, it will kill my sister!"

Mrs. Barton bent toward Gail threateningly.

"Young woman, you can't go! You can't leave us in this mess!"

"I was to leave right after luncheon; that was the bargain," said Gail firmly. "But of course I'll look in on Mrs. Maybury again; I promised to read to her. She wants to test my French!"

"So she told me. But, after you passed my husband's examination in Greek, I'll trust you to get through it. Run along now, but don't you dare leave the house till I've seen you again—not"—she smiled broadly—"till I've subscribed for that book—the India-paper edition! And now," she announced grimly, "I'm going to find Richard!"

To be concluded next week

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Mr. Richard's Fiancée

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

Illustrations by Frank Snapp

MISS ABIGAIL VINCENT, selling "The History of a Thousand Years" to pay her way through college, is mistaken, at a house on the North Shore of Massachusetts, for the fiancée of Richard Maybury, the young son of the house. He begs her to keep up the pretense, which she promises to do until after luncheon, on condition that he buy an India-paper set of the books she is selling. He explains that his fiancée, 'Toinette Gilmore, a chorus girl, has been unaccountably delayed on her first visit to his mother; that his aunt, a stickler for the conventions, and her husband, Bishop Barton, have arrived unexpectedly, and his mother is in her room with a headache. The substitute fiancée visits Mrs. Maybury in her room and makes a good impression, though Mrs. Maybury thinks she does not look like her photograph. Next Gail gets rid of a new cook who is terrorizing the servants, and then meets Mrs. Barton, who begins by trying to buy the supposed chorus girl out of her engagement to her nephew, and ends by being won over by her good sense. At luncheon the Bishop succumbs on learning that she is familiar with Euripides. This rouses Mrs. Barton's suspicions, however, and Gail, when she finds herself alone with her, is forced to tell her of the masquerade. In the meantime Richard has learned that his real fiancée, accused by a fellow boarder in Boston of stealing a pocket-book, has disappeared.

"'Toinette called for a comb and brush, and did amazing things with her hair before a hand-mirror."

A VARIETY of obstacles contributed to the frustration of Gail's plan to escape after luncheon. Under her ministrations Mrs. Maybury slept for an hour, and woke in a mood for further talk. Her frank disclosure of the Maybury family history increased Gail's discomfiture. Then there were notes to write, and Gail's offer to act as amanuensis was readily accepted. At five the reading of an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was interrupted by a furtive tap.

"No doubt it's Richard; I've been very selfish to keep you cooped up in this way," said Mrs. Maybury. "Run along now, and come in before dinner, if you haven't seen too much of me. You are a credit to your teachers, 'Toinette; you read charmingly, with a very good accent."

Richard it was, unquestionably, and a much agitated Richard.

"'Toinette's come! Luckily, I was on the lookout and let her in myself. She's been dodging around the country, and landed here in a taxi. What are we going to do about that?"

"We!" Gail repeated, and followed him down the hall. "Where is she?"

"In the reception-room, scared to death! Of course, she didn't do it—she never saw that woman's pocket-book. But they may follow her here—my God, the very *thought* of it—"

Gail paused. The house was very quiet. Mrs. Barton had gone back to bed; the Bishop was out making a call.

"My time's up," she said slowly; "and there's no reason why I should remain any longer. You'd better confess your sins—and mine—and turn the whole thing off as a joke—a poor one, but still a joke!"

The suggestion did not meet with favor.

"If you'll only ask her to go away till Aunt Peggy leaves, then I'll face it out with mother! I'm not a cad—honestly I'm not; but it all seems different now. You can explain to 'Toinette; I simply can't talk to her so she'll understand."

"You mean to turn her out of the house? I shall do nothing of the kind!"

Gail's last doubt of her duty vanished, and she ran downstairs. A girl—a small, trim young person with a wealth of yellow hair showing under a smart hat—rose and confronted her defiantly. Tears glistened on her long lashes.

"I never did it!" she cried, with a toss of her head; "and it's hard to come here and be told that I can't stay. Dick wasn't kind; he hurt—my—feel-ings! And I haven't any place to go—and to think of being thrown out of the house just because—"

"You're not being put out of the house," said Gail. "Richard's all upset to-day by his mother's illness, and some guests arrived to spoil the nice time he wanted you to have with his mother. And don't cry, *please;* you'll make yourself sick. Come up to your room—your trunk's unpacked and everything's ready for you."

The girl followed, half willing, half resisting, and behind a locked door Gail renewed her efforts to console her.

Finally she undressed 'Toinette and put her to bed.

SOOTHED and reassured, 'Toinette amplified the story of the robbery in the Boston boarding-house. Gail believed her story. It was absurd on the face of it that a girl with 'Toinette's prospects would steal a pocket-book just when a new life opened before her. 'Toinette lay curled in the bed like an unhappy child.

"I'm only a guest here—a friend of the family," Gail explained. "Mrs. Maybury is a frail woman—never very strong, I suppose; but she's anxious to see you, of course. Her sister's coming to-day was unfortunate. Richard's just a little afraid of his aunt—and, naturally, he wanted his mother to know you first—that would simplify everything."

"Dick's ashamed of me," 'Toinette wailed. "I always told him it would be that way. I wouldn't ever be happy here."

"If you love Richard—"

"I don't love him—not any more! And he never truly loved me: he just liked me because I was on the stage. Lots of men go crazy about girls on the stage; it's not love—it's in-fat-u-a-tion. I don't want to see D-i-c-k any more!"

"You'll soon feel differently about everything," said Gail, fighting an inclination to assemble the household and make a clean breast of it. A chivalrous sense of obligation to the girl whose place she had stupidly usurped held her back. 'Toinette grew more tranquil, called for a comb and brush, and did amazing things with her hair before a hand-mirror propped before her. She puckered her pretty lips and dabbed herself with a powder-puff. A child—a mere baby—she seemed to Gail. Then 'Toinette said she was tired, and went to sleep.

AT seven o'clock Gail locked the door, put the key in her pocket, and went down to dinner.

Mrs. Maybury was in cheery humor. She hadn't felt better in a year, she said, smiling at Gail.

"Richard has conducted himself very well to-day," observed his mother. "Don't you think so, 'Toinette? He's certainly been generous in leaving you so much to me. You've both been under a good deal of strain. I remember, the first time I visited my husband's family—"

Gail's mind wandered. 'Toinette might waken and, finding herself a prisoner, rouse the house; or it was even imaginable that the police might demand admission.

The Bishop must needs smoke his cigar in the living-room, and it was incumbent upon Richard to keep him company. After an hour that seemed endless Mrs. Maybury rose, and Gail seized the moment for her release.

She left Mrs. Maybury with Marie and returned to 'Toinette. The girl, fully dressed, looked up with a sad little smile from the desk at which she had evidently been industriously plying a pen.

"I have decided everything," she said.

"Don't decide too much till you've had some supper," said Gail, noting the open closet door and the emptiness beyond. The trunk was packed and ready for closing. It occurred to her that flight with 'Toinette offered the easiest way out of her own difficulties.

She crept down the back stairs to the pantry, found bread and butter, cold meat, and a bottle of milk, and escaped unchallenged.

'Toinette attacked the tray hungrily and called attention to two letters, sealed and addressed, on the writing-table.

"That's good-by forever to Dick. The silly boy! And that's to Sammy Galloway. Ever heard o' him? Sammy was the musical director of 'The Little Billikin,' and the man who wrote 'Wee Little, Shy Little Rose,' and ever so many popular songs. You know I was engaged to Sammy when I met Dick, and he was all broke up when I chucked him for Dick. He was going to have my voice trained and write a piece specially to send me out in when we were married. He's the best ever—that boy! He said if I ever needed a friend to let him know. And just day before yesterday I wrote him a letter to tell him I was beating it for the high places. He always said no girl as temperamental as I am could ever be happy in one of these old aristocratic families, and that I'd be silly to give up my art for Dick Maybury. He always said Dick wouldn't ever marry me anyhow after his folks got on to it.

"Sammy knows by this time all about that scrape at the boarding-house, because it was in the papers; and Sammy'll be sorry—Sammy's always sorry for people in trouble. I'm going back to the bright lights, and he can go to work on that new piece whenever he's ready. So that for Dick Maybury!"

A snap of her fingers and the lifting of a very pretty chin expressed her complete contempt for Mr. Richard Maybury.

"This is a great responsibility," s: Gail soberly. "I don't know about letting you go in this way. You ought to : Richard; I will arrange that—"

"Not on your life, you won't! I'm done

"If his heart's broken and his li ruined—" Gail began tentatively.

"Him! You couldn't break his heart with an ax! Any man who's afraid of his relations isn't worth bothering about. How can I get a lift out o' here?"

Gail left her to investigate the transportation facilities of the establishment; but first she sought an interview with Mrs. Barton, who answered her summons in a bath-wrapper that vastly magnified her heroic figure.

"That young scoundrel!" Mrs. Barton commented, when she had heard Gail's second confession. "His mother must never know of this! The girl has more sense than I imagined possible in a chorus girl. The servants mustn't know; we'll have to wait till they've gone to bed. I'll call up the chauffeur myself and tell him to be ready."

"But—is that quite fair—to the girl?" asked Gail. "She's such a little thing; I don't like sending her off that way."

Mrs. Barton mused a moment.

"There's something in that," she admitted. "You might take her to my house at Lenox till this thing blows over. But there's no reason why you should get mixed up in it. You're under no obligation to us, nor to the girl!" She checked her mounting wrath, and the humor shone in her eyes. "And if you're not here tomorrow what can we say to my sister?"

"Right there," said Gail, with a flash of indignation, "is where your nephew's got to take this thing off our hands!"

THEY had decided that 'Toinette could not leave before eleven o'clock, when they were startled by the mad honking of a motor at the gate.

"The police!" Mrs. Barton gasped.

A machine was heard running into the grounds, and Gail bolted for the stairway, with Mrs. Barton clinging to her arm.

"You send them away and I'll keep the servants back!" she panted, when they reached the front door. With long strides she gained the door to the back hall.

The bell tinkled faintly. Gail's heart thumped as she waited for her fellow conspirator to dispose of Grimes.

"All right," Mrs. Barton called, and Gail threw open the door.

A young man—a very good-looking

young man—stood blinking in the entry light.

"Is this Mrs. Maybury's? I wasn't sure I had the right place."

It was the right place, Gail assured him, holding fast to the brass door-knob. The visitor fingered his hat nervously. If a policeman, he bore no visible signs of his trade, and Gail's hopes rose. He took a step nearer, and Gail tightened her hold on the knob.

"Mrs. Maybury has retired; if you wish to see her you will have to come tomorrow."

"I don't want to see Mrs. Maybury," he replied impatiently. "Is Mr. Richard Maybury here? I want to see *him*."

Lying had not been in the curriculum at Nebraska University, but it struck Gail as expedient to add to the burden of the day's dissimulation by answering that Mr. Richard Maybury was not at home; she added that he was in the city and might not return for a day or two.

This seemed unwelcome news to the visitor, and with a sudden change of manner he shook his hat in Gail's face.

"I'm looking for Miss Gilmore—Miss 'Toinette Gilmore. She came to this house this afternoon, and I want to see her! You needn't tell me she's not here, for I know better. You go right in and tell her I'm here—Sammy Galloway. I'm an old friend of hers."

GAIL'S hand dropped from the door, and her relief found expression in a laugh that caused him to stare.

"Please come in, Mr. Galloway. Of course you may see Miss Gilmore."

"I was afraid," said Gail, when she had ushered him into the reception-room, "that it might be some unfriendly person looking for Miss Gilmore; but if you're Mr. Galloway—"

"Did she tell you about me? When I heard 'Toinette was in trouble, I hit the trail right away to find her. Of course I supposed you people would look out for her all right enough; but I didn't want to take chances. I suppose Maybury's gone to Boston to straighten that thing out, but it's all over. That woman never lost her pocketbook—left it in a car in the subway, that's all! And just because 'Toinette had been a chorus girl she tried to tie it on her! And, being scared to death, 'Toinette beat it instead of sitting tight. Well, I just wanted to tell the kid it's all right."

"'Toinette," said Gail, "has been writing you a letter. She's changed her mind about marrying Mr. Maybury. She—"

"What?" shouted Galloway, dropping his hat. "She's fired him!"

"That's what she meant to do a few minutes ago. It's not my affair, you understand; but I'll send her down."

"I'm going to take her away with me!" Galloway cried excitedly. "She's got to marry me right away before she gets into any more scrapes. God bless the kid!"

"I must be sure," said Gail deliberately, "before you take her away, that you mean the best for her; that—"

His eyes opened wide.

"I'm on the square," he answered soberly and with deep feeling. "I've loved her from the first day I saw her—the poor little kid! She's a good girl, 'Toinette is—just the best that ever happened! I've a sister in Boston, and I'm going to take her right there to her house till we can get the papers. You needn't be afraid of me!"

TWO weeks later Miss Abigail Vincent appeared in the neighborhood of Gloucester, carrying a parasol as the emblem of her ladyhood, and to all appearances wholly innocent of the presence of a concealed prospectus of that invaluable work, "The History of a Thousand Years."

For a fortnight Mrs. Barton had clung to her by moral, not to say physical, force. The Bishop, having read of 'Toinette's marriage in a Boston newspaper, had been let into the secret perforce, and he discoursed eloquently upon Gail's Christian duty. Gail had reason to believe that the servants knew that the occupant of the south guest-room was not, in fact, the person she had represented herself to be. The removal of 'Toinette's trunk and the arrival of Gail's own luggage from the Beverly boarding-house (a substitution effected with characteristic determination by Mrs. Barton) could hardly have failed to arouse suspicions. Nor had Gail been unmindful of the fact that Mr. Richard Maybury had been evincing an interest in her which she found it embarrassing to avoid.

"'You played at being engaged to me for two weeks; now you refuse to go on with it. Gail—'"

Finally, when Mrs. Maybury asked her to set down the names of people she proposed to ask to a tea in honor of Richard's fiancée, Gail fled in a panic.

It was a warm afternoon, and persons of wealth and culture were not manifesting that interest in "The History of a Thousand Years" which might reasonably be expected of them. The honking of a motor approaching at high speed caused Gail to step out of the road, and as she waited indifferently for it to pass, the brakes were jammed on and Richard G. Maybury sprang out of his runabout.

"I've been chasing you all over creation, and if I hadn't got a tip at the publisher's that you were around here I might never have found you. I've got to talk to you!"

"It's unkind and just the least bit impudent for you to follow me."

"That's what I told mother and Aunt Peggy; but they said I had to find you. It isn't my fault, really, that I came. I wouldn't have had the nerve."

"I've noticed your lack of courage," she replied coldly.

"Please don't rub it in. I didn't have Aunt Peggy to back me when I showed the white feather before, but she's behind me now—very much behind me! She and the Bishop stopped at an inn to rest; they're mighty anxious to see you. Mother's taking it pretty hard, you know," he added gravely. "She's been quite ill."

"I'm sorry," said Gail honestly. "I hope she got my letter."

"Oh, it was a wonderful letter! She's forgiven you, all right enough; but you can see where it leaves *me!*"

"It leaves you, Mr. Maybury, exactly where you ought to be left!"

They became aware that they were blocking the highway, and she accepted his invitation to get into the car. They rode for a mile in silence. Then Gail declared that she must resume her assaults upon potential purchasers of "The History of a Thousand Years." He scouted this. It was difficult to talk in the runabout, and she consented to walk out on the shore.

"How's the book selling?" he inquired, when they were seated on a big boulder.

"What do you suppose that artist sees to paint over there?" she inquired casually.

There was no artist in the immediate landscape. When he looked at her for enlightenment, she was demurely turning the pages of the prospectus.

"*Of course* I have to hide it," she explained. "I'd never get anywhere if they knew I was a book agent."

He turned the pages. She had sold seven sets, but they were not all the India-paper edition. Having disposed of the book business, they contemplated the Atlantic.

"I had a note from 'Toinette this morning—the jolliest sort of note! She says she's so happy she doesn't want me to think she has any hard feelings, and she hopes I'll always be happy. Mighty nice of her, don't you think?"

"Splendidly magnanimous!"

"You're mighty hard on me," he said dolefully. "I suppose you'll never believe that what I did was only to save mother's feelings. She was all keyed for 'Toinette, and I simply had to produce somebody! The chorus girl part of it was bad enough to spring on her suddenly; but when 'Toinette didn't show up, and all that rumpus about her stealing a pocket-book!" He extended his arms to the sea as if expecting Neptune to rise to his aid. "The great trouble about the whole business was that you lifted the standard too high! From thinking no girl was good enough for me, they've decided now that a particular girl is too good for any man—you ought to hear them talk! The Bishop has been mourning ever since you left. And old Grimes is a changed man; the way you bounced the cook made a big hit with him! I tell you, the house is like a tomb."

"You seem to be bearing up pretty well," Gail remarked, playing with the leaves of the dummy, "considering that the girl of your choice threw you over to marry another man."

"Now," he replied spiritedly, "try to be fair about it. Don't you honestly think it was a good thing she did? From what you saw of her, don't you think she's a lot happier as things turned out? Just answer me that!"

"That's not the question," Gail began. "It's—"

"It is the question—the only one we're talking about. You wouldn't change it if you could, would you?"

"That's not a fertile field for speculation, Mr. Maybury. And you're taking up my time when I ought to be at work."

"On the other hand, you're causing my mother and incidentally me a lot of heartache unnecessarily. You played at being engaged to me for two weeks; now you refuse to go on with it! Gail—"

"Miss Vincent," she corrected.

"Gail, Aunt Peggy says she believes you can make a man of me if anybody can. But if you'll go back with me, so I can square myself with mother, I won't ask you to be engaged to me again—not for a long, long time. Gail!"

"Never, never anything like that!" she said. But a big wave struck the rocks malevolently, and it is only a fair assumption that her words were drowned by the roar.

His hand closed over hers; and, as she resisted, the prospectus of "The History of a Thousand Years" slipped from her grasp, slid from the rock, and sought refuge in the Atlantic.